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BEFORE ADAM



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CHAPTER V.

This bombardment drew Saber Tooth's attention to us and made him angrier than ever. He abandoned his pursuit of the two folk and sprang up the bluff toward the rest of us, clawing at the crumbling rock and snarling as he clawed his upward way. At this awful sight, the last one of us sought refuge inside our caves. I know this, because I peeped out and saw the whole bluff side deserted, save for Saber Tooth, who had lost his footing and was sliding and falling down.

I called out the cry of encouragement, and again the bluff was covered by the screaming horde, and the stones were falling faster than ever. Saber Tooth was frantic with rage. Time and again he assaulted the bluff. Once he even gained the first crevice, entrance before he fell back, but was unable to force his way inside. With each upward rush he made waves of

terror. It was never restrained. There was nothing halfway about it. When a thing was funny we were convulsed with appreciation of it, and the simplest, crudest things were funny to us. Oh, we were great laughers. I can tell you!

The way we had treated Saber Tooth was the way we treated all animals that invaded the village. We kept our runways and drinking places to ourselves by making life miserable for the animals that trespassed or strayed upon our immediate territory. Even the fiercest hunting animals we so bedeviled that they learned to leave our places alone. We were not fighters like them; we were cunning and cowardly, and it was because of our cunning and cowardice and our inordinate capacity for fear that we survived in that frightfully hostile environment of the younger world.

Lop Ear, I figure, was a year older than I. What his past history was he had no way of telling me, but as I never saw anything of his mother I believed him to be an orphan. After all, fathers did not count in our horde. Marriage was as yet in a rude state, and couples had a way of quarreling and separating. Modern man, what of his divorce institution, does the same thing legally. But we had no laws. Custom was all we went by, and our custom in this particular matter was rather promiscuous.

Nevertheless, as this narrative will show later on, we betrayed glimmering adumbrations of the monogamy that was later to give power to and make mighty such tribes as embraced it. Furthermore, even at the time I was born, there were several faithful couples that lived in the trees in the neighborhood of my mother. Living in the thick of the horde did not conduce to monogamy. It was for this reason, undoubtedly, that the faithful couples went away and lived by themselves. Through many years these couples stayed together, though when the man or woman died or was eaten the survivor invariably found a new mate.

There was one thing that greatly puzzled me during the first days of my residence in the horde. There was a nameless and incommunicable fear that rested upon all. At first it appeared to be connected wholly with direction. The horde feared the northeast. It lived in perpetual apprehension of that quarter of the compass. And every individual gazed more frequently and with greater alarm in that direction than in any other.

When Lop Ear and I went toward the northeast to eat the stringy rooted carrot that at that season were at their best he became unusually timid. He was content to eat the leavings, the big tough carrots and the little rosy ones, rather than to venture a short distance farther on to where the carrots were as yet untouched. When I so ventured he scolded me and quarreled with me. He gave me to understand that in that direction was some horrible danger, but just what the horrible danger was his paucity of language would not permit him to say.

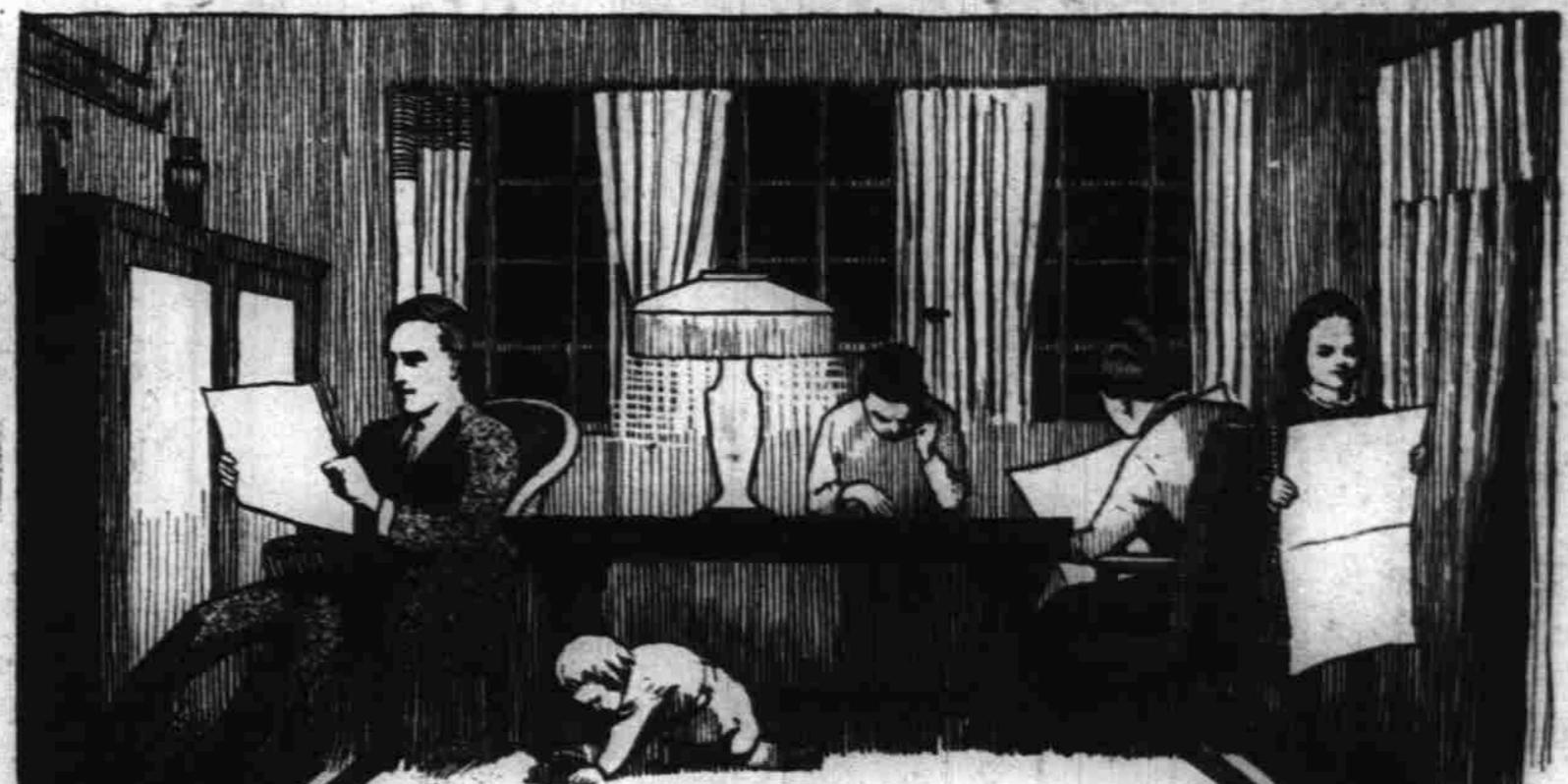
Many a good meal I got in this fashion, while he scolded and chattered vainly at me. I could not understand. I kept very alert, but I could see no danger. I calculated always the distance between myself and the nearest tree and knew that to that haven of refuge I could outfoot the Tawny One or old Saber Tooth did one or the other suddenly appear.

One late afternoon in the village a great uproar arose. The horde was animated with a single emotion, that of fear. The bluff side swarmed with the folk, all gazing and pointing into the northeast. I did not know what it was, but I scrambled all the way up to the safety of my own high little cave before ever I turned around to see.

And then across the river, away into the northeast, I saw for the first time the mystery of smoke. It was the biggest animal I had ever seen. I thought it was a monster snake, up ended, rearing its head high above the trees and swaying back and forth. And yet somehow I seemed to gather from the conduct of the folk that the smoke itself was not the danger. They appeared to fear it as the token of something else. What this something else was I was unable to guess. Nor could they tell me. Yet I was soon to know, and I was to know it as a thing more terrible than the Tawny One, than old Saber Tooth, than the snakes themselves, than which it seemed there could be no things more terrible.

Broken Tooth was another youngster who lived by himself. His mother lived in the caves, but two more children had come after him and he had been thrust out to shift for himself. We had witnessed the performance during the several preceding days, and it had given us no little glee. Broken Tooth did not want to go, and every time his mother left the cave he sneaked back into it. When she returned and found him there her rages were delightful. Half the horde made a practise of watching for these moments. First, from within the cave, would come her scolding and shrieking. Then we could hear sounds of the thrashing and the yelling of Broken Tooth. About this time the two younger children joined in. And finally, like the eruption of a miniature volcano, Broken Tooth would come flying out.

At the end of several days his leaving home was accomplished. He walked his grief unheeded from the center of the open space for at least half an hour, and then came to live with Lop Ear and me. Our cave was small, but



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with squeezing there was room for three. I have no recollection of Broken Tooth spending more than one night with us, so the accident must have happened right away.

It came in the middle of the day. In the morning we had eaten our fill of the carrots and then made headless by play, we had ventured on to the big trees just beyond. I cannot understand how Lop Ear got over his habitual caution, but it must have been the play. We were having a great time playing tree tag. And such tag! We leaped ten or fifteen foot gaps as a matter of course. And a twenty or twenty-five foot deliberate drop clear down to the ground was nothing to us. In fact, I am almost afraid to say the great distances we dropped. As we grew older and heavier we found we had to be more cautious in dropping, but at that age our bodies were all strings and springs, and we could do anything.

(To be Continued Tomorrow).

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